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'Close your door and go to your happy place'

Elizabeth Huff
The Enquirer

Kathleen Hall had a knack for making money on Wall Street.

"I thought I had the world on a string," she said.



She didn't see the more scotch she drank and the more cars she leased to match her coats were signals she was headed toward a mental breakdown, she said.

After a paralyzing panic attack about 20 years ago, she thought her life was over.

But it was just beginning.

She spoke of her journey from venture capitalist to founder and chief executive officer of The Stress Institute, an Atlanta-based educational group. Her advice has been featured on many major media outlets, including NBC, CNN, USA Today and The Wall Street Journal.

On Tuesday night, she shared what she has learned from science and spirituality about stress management with more than 100 health professionals who attended the Health Care Leadership Forum event at the Battle Creek Country Club.

Hall emphasized mindfulness in every aspect of living. Using the acronym S.E.L.F. (serenity, exercise, love, food), she explained the importance of taking care of the self first.

"Stress is the driver for most diseases," she said. "Learn how to manage it. It's just like managing diabetes or anything else."

She spoke of simple ways to incorporate serenity, exercise, love and food into daily living like "deskercising," which is exercising while sitting behind a desk at work by lifting hand weights and stretching. She emphasized meditation, eating nutrient-rich foods and connecting with friends.

For many, it was a validation of what they have been teaching for years.

"It was affirming," Susan Taylor, a social worker for Oaklawn Hospital's Outpatient Psychological Services. "We already do a lot of the things she talked about in our program."

Co-worker Cindy Wagner said she uses breathing and visualization techniques with her adolescent clients. Another co-worker, Marilyn Strobel, laughed as she said she'd make a blueberry coffee cake for the office the next day because Hall said blueberries are an extremely nutrient-rich food.

Dr. Phil Ptacin of DayOne Family Healthcare PC said he recently began recommending meditation to his patients. Dr. Mary Ellen Benzik with Family Health Center of Battle Creek agreed with Hall's message that anyone can meditate.

"I think part of it is so simple," she said. "It's just close your door and go to your happy place."

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For the Enquirer

Kathleen Hall, founder and chief executive officer of The Stress Institute in Atlanta

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